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Church & Social Problem

FELLOWSHIP

A MEANS OF BUILDING THE CHRISTIAN SOCIAL ORDER

BY

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AND

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WITH A PREFACE BY

SHERWOOD EDDY

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PREFACE

The peoples of the earth are in confusion. In the presence of complex and dangerous problems, they stand perplexed and hesitating. They need light. The disastrous consequences of a war waged in the spirit of high idealism have left many with a cynical attitude toward all ideals. They need vision. In the present hour men and women of high ideals are tempted to be unduly timid and cautious about proclaiming their message. The forces of reaction are in the ascendancy. Slander and persecution await those who run counter to accepted traditions. Courage is needed.

Confronted with complex problems, cynical indifference and the attacks of reactionaries, many men and women of high purpose are lonely and discouraged. Some feel that they alone of all the multitude have not bowed the knee to Baal. They need inspiration and companionship. In this hour many are filled with a sense of impotence. They need coöperation from those of like mind and purpose.

Light! Vision! Courage! Companionship! Coöperation! These are sorely needed.

The book from which the following extracts are taken represents the beginning of a literature in Great Britain born of a new experience. A number of "Fellowships" have been formed in England which have rediscovered some of the hidden springs of life and power of early Christianity. Mr. C. A. A. Scott in his chapter on "What Happened at Pentecost," in that most helpful volume on "The Spirit" edited by Canon Streeter, maintains that the new thing which took place on the day of Pentecost was the emergence of fellowship. A new type of life had appeared in the world. It was the life of God in the hearts of a community of men in fellowship with the Living Christ. This fellowship on the divine side was the organ of the Spirit, an extension of the Incarnation, the "body of Christ" on earth, the social organism for the expression of the very life and being of God in human personalities. On the human side the fellowship was the organ of spiritual insight. Together, of one heart and soul, under a common leadership, they realized a common mind, and growingly

apprehended the will of God. Together in a deepening fellowship with God and man they shared a common life and went out to conquer a world with an enlarging experience of love that multiplied as it was shared.

It is this experience of a spiritual fellowship, the very life of God shared with a group of men and women in harmony with His purpose, that is a supreme need of our time, and especially in our own country. The American is so motor-minded, rushes so instantly into action and organization that he does not take sufficient time for deliberation. It is to such an enlarging experience of fellowship in thought and prayer that this book calls us.

Recently a group of persons from ten states gathered together in New York City. After two days of prayer and discussion, there was general agreement that a Fellowship for a Christian Social Order had spontaneously come into being. These persons are now endeavoring to gather together informal Fellowship groups in various centers throughout the United States. Persons who are interested may secure further information concerning this movement by communicating with its secretary, Mr. Kirby Page, 311 Division Avenue, Hasbrouck Heights, New Jersey.

Information concerning The Fellowship of Reconciliation, composed of men and women who seek to apply the principles and spirit of Jesus in all relationships of life, and who hold an uncompromising attitude toward sanctioning or participating in war, may be secured from Bishop Paul Jones, 108 Lexington Avenue, New York City.

We are deeply indebted to the authors and publisher of the book *Fellowship in Thought and Prayer* for permission to print these extracts for wider circulation.

SHERWOOD EDDY.

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NOTE

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I: THE MEANING OF FELLOWSHIP

"The lack of Fellowship is hell."
—William Morris.

I

Fellowship, like all elemental things, defies definition. Its subtle and powerful essence escapes through the closest mesh of words. Those who have in any full sense shared intimate fellowship will feel a disappointing inadequacy at any attempt to express its reality. The power of fellowship in life, its transforming influence in personality, and its revolutionary moral power can never be conveyed by any form of words to those who have not shared it.

At root, fellowship is a living intercourse between personalities. It is such an intercourse charged through and through with both freedom and love, and kept active by a common aim. Love is at once the tether of the comradeship and the stimulus of its corporate life in pursuit of the quest. Freedom is the "wind on the heath" of fellowship, keeping the affection of the Round Table from becoming stale or stagnant or oppressive.

Fellowship, then, is an active comradeship between personalities, men or women or both, who unite with one another in a common worship, or battle for a common quest, or play their game for the honour of a team, or pool their separate thoughts in constructing and carrying into effect a single plan, or who simply share the needs and desires of a common humanity. "These are the ties which, though light as air, are as strong as links of iron."

Fellowship, in short, is all that divine and human commerce between souls which makes a number of separate men into a living group. In fellowship they pull together like a team tugging the wagon of life forward. They move together like a boat's crew swinging as one man in a disciplined unity of will to win their race. A group in real fellowship has, in fact, many of the qualities of a personality. Through the power of fellowship

separate personalities blend in a society of friends that has an identity, a characteristic quality, and a power of concerted action that increase the potentialities of each individual.

The story of man is full of the revolutions in human conditions made by the power of such fellowship exercised in groups of men. Such groups have often centred in the attractive and compelling power of some personality dedicated to an idea. Yet that personality itself is the creation as often as it is the creator of fellowship. In fact, fellowship rarely takes permanent form unless the compelling force that draws the men together is greater than any human personality. The cohesive power is normally exercised by loyalty to an idea or co-operation in a steadily pursued plan or a common worship.

Great movements in the world's history, associated as they are in the popular conception with the leadership of some powerful personality, can generally be traced in origin to the seed plot of some group of men whose fellowship in thought and often in prayer has itself been the nursery of that man's power of great leadership. John Woolman moving in his circle in America, and Wilberforce with his friends in England, debated and developed those germinal ideas which destroyed on the battlefields of America and in the Parliament of Britain the slavery that was arraigned first at the judgment bar of the Christian conscience. John Henry Newman, in concert with the flaming souls of Hurrell Froude and the others of their group, nursed and fanned the sparks that blazed out in the Oxford Movement. Mazzini and his comrades proclaimed and fought for the twin doctrines of nationality and liberty that now begin to govern the world. The Gottesfreunde similarly prepared the mind of Teutonic Europe for the stormy message of Luther. The Holy Club meeting in Wesley's room in Lincoln College toughened the fibre and speeded and strengthened the indomitable wills that transformed England. Francis of Assisi with his group of Poor Brothers gave Europe such a vision of the divine light on earth as she had not seen before nor has witnessed since. And above all stands that first fellowship which moved through the villages of Judæa and by the cornfields and lake side of Galilee and then went out to "turn the world upside down."

These examples that leap to the memory illustrate the irresistible power of fellowship working in men who are so welded to one another by a common loyalty to a great idea that they have one will, one faith, and one divine ambition. In them we discover that the leader is essentially the voice of the fellowship; we realise the truth of Bishop Brent's declaration that "the leader is simply the foremost companion."

In the quickening atmosphere of such confident and intimate fellowship, where

> Thought leaps out to wed with thought
> Ere thought can wed itself with speech;

and where men's separatist rivalries and competing ambitions are annealed and welded into a loyal common pursuit of a single quest, we discover the principle of moral co-operation in redeeming the world.

II

Nothing, however, is more fatal to fellowship than uniformity among those who compose it, or complete agreement in their views.

The fallacy that a group is best when it consists of men or women of one type of mind or similarity in outlook is perilous. Uniformity of temperament or agreement in all opinion makes fellowship anæmic and flaccid. Fellowship is at once tested and strengthened by the pooling of divergent views and coalescing of varied personalities. The brilliant and glorious strength, the rich, full-blooded vitality of the first Christian fellowship lay in the fact that the team of the twelve included such personalities as Andrew the gentle but persistent, Peter the impetuous but uncertain, the mystical yet aggressive Sons of Thunder, Thomas the sceptical logician and Matthew the dedicated business man. Indeed one cause of the anæmia and dulness that paralyse much of our modern fellowship lies on one side in the fact that we draw in the cautious Thomases and shrewd Matthews, but tend to freeze out the other types by questioning the good taste of the volcanic and explosive Peter (coming in too with the smell of fish on his linen!) and by agreeing that after all John, amiable dreamer as he is, is "not what we should call practical."

But in reality, that "infinite variety" is the very fountain of power in fellowship when it is caught up into the vital unity of a common leader and a single quest. And that diversity in unity finds superb power and immortal validity when the loyalty is given to the Son of God and the single quest is the campaign for His world kingdom. It is then—and only then—that the horizon of the fellowship is ultimate and the resources of its power are infinite. The supreme fellowship is the Christian Fellowship.

If fellowship, then, is rooted in intercourse but does not involve either uniformity of type or identity of opinion, what normally is the basis on which the intercourse proceeds? As a rule it is

rooted and grows from a common spiritual experience which issues in a common spiritual experience to achieve a certain aim. To examine the fellowships that we have given as examples, the groups which created and carried through the Franciscan Movement, the Methodist Revival, the Oxford Movement, the Anti-Slavery Campaign, and the Young Italy Campaigns, is to discover in them all those qualities of a common spiritual experience and quest. In every case differences are many and divergence of view is pronounced; but unity regulates and controls the differences.

The glory of the gift of fellowship lies in the fact that, while action is based on the discovered and experienced unity, thought becomes fullest and most fruitful when it audaciously explores the territories of difference. To penetrate without flinching through these dreaded places of divergence has proved again and again, as Livingstone discovered when he crossed the Great Desert, that the land which men had always declared to be a desert turned out to be a whole continent "full of great rivers and many trees." In particular, it has been proved most richly that to Christian folk who keep their hearts quick to the ultimate fact of their unity in Christ it is possible to explore to their farthest depths those forests of difference which have kept men apart, and to discover that, after all, the solution of our divergences will be reached, not by surrendering our sacred convictions, but by discovering a higher, richer, more glorious and hitherto unsuspected synthesis. And the unifying power by which that synthesis is reached is always personal fellowship in a real experience of Christ.

III

The strength of fellowship reposes, then, on the fact that to men of limited view and partial capacity immense enrichment at once of personal power and of corporate action comes from sharing their thought and their prayer in dedication to a common aim. But, although the feebleness and relative futility of individual men are thus swallowed up in the larger powers of corporate thought and action, the actual desire for fellowship is not a product of the weakness of men; it is rooted in the very being and nature of God. "God," as Madame Guyon has said, "has an infinite desire to communicate Himself." Indeed the very heart of the supreme Act of God in giving Himself in Christ was His desire to reconcile to Himself the estranged faces of men—in a word, His aim was fellowship. God lives in fellowship, for God is Love.

That picture gallery of the nature of God—the parables—is just a series of windows into the heart of fellowship. The central idea of the shepherd in leaving the ninety and nine for the one is to complete the fellowship. The distinction between the hireling and the Good Shepherd is that the former cares nothing and the latter will give everything for the fellowship. The climax of the story of the prodigal son is the restoration of fellowship; and the damning sin of the otherwise blameless elder brother is that he refuses to join in it. The growth of the Kingdom is like leaven. The final seal on discipleship is that the men have climbed from the status of a bondslave to the standard of the friend: they have entered into fellowship. The whole story of the Gospels, indeed, is the record of the training of a fellowship that found in the Fatherhood of God the supreme authority for the source of the fellowship of His sons.

Our definition of fellowship as living intercourse, however, involves that it can only exist where there is reciprocity. To give to men is not to have fellowship with them. Fellowship of the order that bridges all divisions of race and social status and sex is not made even by giving the most heroic, persistent and philanthropic service. We may die for men or give royally, yet may fail to create the one thing that they are starving for, if we do not give ourselves in fellowship; if we do not share as well as give. The paradoxes of St. Paul's song of love are all based on this fact that to preach or give money or even go to the stake are not in themselves fellowship. "You have given your goods to feed the poor," said Bishop Azariah, speaking for the people of India and addressing men and women of other races who cared supremely for India. "You have given your bodies to be burned. We would ask for love. *Give us friends.*"

This fact that human life is not fed save on such fellowship, and that fellowship comes through sharing and not merely giving, is restated vividly in Lowell's "The Vision of Sir Launfal"; where Christ, discovered by Sir Launfal in the leper with whom the knight has shared bread and water by a stream, says:

> The Holy Supper is kept indeed
> In what so we share with another's need.
> Not what we give but what we share
> For the gift without the giver is bare.
> Who gives himself with his gift feeds three,
> Himself, his hungering neighbour and ME.

IV

Fellowship, then, is impossible apart from personal intercourse on a common footing. We believe that there is, when we get down to the bed-rock realities of life, no common footing to be discovered in the fact of being human. The brotherhood of man (biologically, anthropologically, ethnologically man) simply does not exist either in his history or his make-up or his prospects. Inter-class prejudices and diversities, international differences and distastes, inter-racial antipathies and even loathings make it impossible to secure a common footing there. "Experience leads me to the conviction," said Sir Sidney Olivier on the basis of experience as Governor of Jamaica, where the problem of the relationship of white and black is a permanent pre-occupation of statesmanship, "that there is no basis for inter-racial relationship save on a spiritual plane." That is to say, there is no real basis for real fellowship on a world scale save on a spiritual plane. Men, in a word, are not brothers by birth in the human sense; they are brothers by new birth in the superhuman sense. Their brotherhood finds absolute and enduring reality only in a spiritual parentage—in a word, in the Fatherhood of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. That common sonship found in sharing the sonship of Jesus Christ does in fact—and not in rhetoric—form the one permanent foundation of world-fellowship.

On the increasing practice of fellowship, in the sense of the triumph of unity over discord between nations and races, in sober fact the future of that world depends. For such fellowship beginning as it does between individual men finds a fuller operation between groups and organisations, between clans and nations and races. The whole story of human progress is, in this aspect, the dramatic record of the gradual substitution of higher forms of unity for division. So inter-tribal fighting and clan war die as the unity develops the clans into the nation or the tribes in the race. And the crucial issue of our own century is simply and centrally whether the principle of fellowship embodied in a world-league of nations and of races is or is not to supersede that lack of fellowship which (as William Morris has said) means hell, and has meant between nations in our own day a hell of inextinguishable anguish.

We have been forced by the frightful logic of war to recognise that the erection of the solitary ambition of one empire above the general right of all nations is on the international scale the precise equivalent of lack of fellowship between individual men; and that

just that failure in fellowship between nations involved humanity in the maiming and destruction of the flower of its young life and in the intolerable agony of war. But that international complex of antagonisms, that uneasy balance of armed power defending competing interests, is simply the expression in the field of international affairs of the inter-class antagonisms, the commercial rivalries, the civic jealousies, the interdenominational distrusts, and the personal bickerings that hold considerable sway in the national, ecclesiastical, local and individual life.

V

The central aim of the new world, then, is the increase of fellowship. The supreme need of men of all races is that they should share, not formal agreements that may be torn up, not superficial delimitations of influence that simply secure a temporary and uneasy peace through separation by railings and fences; but a growing fellowship of rich intercourse. The ultimate salvation of the world lies in the practice of that Christian fellowship which will alone bridge inter-racial gulfs and inter-class chasms.

To that end we need, first, fellowship within the Church and between the Churches, for, literally, fellowship is the life-blood of the Christian Church. It is the pulsating arterial flow which sets all the limbs of her immortal body tingling with divine vitality and vigor, and fits her for the service of man and the glory of God. We need fellowship between capital and labour, for there alone lies the hope—and it is a rich hope—of building up a national life in which each class shall give its service for the strength and joy of the whole. Superlatively the call comes for fellowship between races of all colours. For in a world literally made one by the miracles of physical science applied to communication and transport, and made helpless against those miracles of science applied to the slaughter of men, there is no alternative to a growing fellowship of mutual understanding save a swift and ghastly increase of inter-racial rivalry in trade ambitions and labour jealousies. Such rivalry will precipitate humanity over the precipice of universal war into the abyss of barbarism, where men will cringe in helpless terror and in unavailing remorse amid the ruins of a world whose rich heritage might have been saved by the practice of fellowship.

The supreme need of the world, then, is to replace the competing rivalries of hate by the generous rivalries of Christian fellowship on every plane of human life—individual, commercial, religious,

between the classes, international, and lastly, but supremely, interracial. Only so can the world escape, not only further degradation and the agony of greater wars, but the ultimate ruin of ordered and humane life. Beginning in the individual and working upward and outward it is essential that comity should replace conflict, that fellowship should rule in every sphere of life, and that the irresistible authority of an alliance of nations working in moral co-operation should plan and erect, assailable yet impregnable, the walls of the City of God.

II: FELLOWSHIP IN THOUGHT AND PRAYER

I

The starting-point is found in a fresh recognition—so vivid and powerful as to constitute almost a re-discovery—of three of the Church's age-long convictions.

The first of these is the belief in the Divine sufficiency. Admittedly, the Church is far too weak of herself to satisfy the manifold and bitter need of the world. For this, God, and God only, is sufficient. But that He *is* sufficient is not merely a beautiful theory; it is a most real and practical fact on which we must learn to count with a more simple directness. Though we ourselves neither are nor ever can be equal to the situation that confronts us, God is equal to it. His matchless wisdom is never baffled. The situation may well be one which He Himself did not design—the creation, not of His purpose, but of man's wilful misuse of his freedom. None the less on that account, the action for which it calls is plainly manifest to Him. So long as God lives no position will be hopeless. There can be no problem of human life, however complicated by human wrongdoing, of which He does not see the right solution.

Not only does God perceive this solution, but—and here is the second conviction—it is also His Will to reveal it. The God Whom Jesus made known, Who numbers the very hairs of our head and without Whose notice not a sparrow falls to the ground, does not dwell apart from the world that He has made. As the Incarnation has taught us once for all, He is to be found in the midst of the world's travail and agony, seeking to bring order out of chaos and moral life out of moral death. Such a God will not leave us to ourselves as we strive to act as His allies: He will be ceaselessly waiting to guide us.

At no time, therefore, need we be dependent solely upon our own wisdom: there is a higher Wisdom to which we have free and constant access. In whatever capacity we may be called upon to

act (whether as citizens or as members of a church or as private individuals), and by whatever circumstances our conduct may be conditioned (whether by those ordained of God Himself or by others originated through human folly), we can find ourselves in no position in which He is not willing to reveal the path He requires us to follow. The New Testament promise of guidance, far too prominent in its pages ever to be eradicated, implies that through our fellowship with God in Christ our own thought may be corrected and informed by the Divine thought.[1] In so far as this ideal is realised, in all the problems of the Kingdom we may count with simple confidence upon God's detailed and particular direction.

This daring assertion leads us naturally to the third of the convictions on which the deeper emphasis is being laid. Like all the spiritual gifts of God, the guidance thus claimed is spiritually conditioned. We must be ready to receive as well as He to bestow. Indeed, the Divine gift will be proportionate to the human receptivity. It is only as our will is progressively surrendered to His perfect Will that the Divine direction can be made progressively clear to us.

II

On this third conviction it will be necessary for us to dwell a little more fully. In the quest for guidance the submission of our will to God must manifest itself at two important points.

In the first place, we need to be set free from all self-assertion in our thinking. Human self-assertion forms the chief hindrance to the revelation of God's Will. It is but too easy unwittingly and unintentionally to deaden our sensitiveness to His voice through prejudice and personal predilections. Not unnaturally almost every problem is approached with an individual bias of some kind. We are apt to hold tenaciously to particular views already formed, or to particular methods rendered familiar by custom, and in consequence the peril of a bondage to our preconceived ideas is never, perhaps, entirely absent. There is the risk, again, so long as we are human, that our thinking may be influenced by our individual wishes. The knowledge that through our decision we ourselves or others may be affected in position or authority, or that some favourite plan may be promoted or frus-

[1] "In this connection I may refer to 1 Corinthians ii. 16, 'We have the mind of Christ,' which does not merely mean, we 'think' as Christ thinks, but 'Christ thinks in us'; the mental processes of the Christian are under the immediate inspiration of the spirit of Christ."—Johannes Weiss, "Paul and Jesus," p. 115. (E. T.)

trated, may readily impel our judgment in this direction or in that. All thinking into which such considerations are allowed to enter implies a merely partial consecration of the will. The love of our own preferences and desires—even in relation to the Kingdom of God—may prove an effective barrier between our souls and Him. Unless we are prepared, when we profess to seek God's guidance, to give up, should He ask it, our own strongest wishes and most deeply-rooted prejudices, we are imposing conditions upon God: we are setting Him limits within which to work; we are saying, in effect, that we pray Him to lead us *provided that the leading shall be kept within the bounds of our own fixed opinions.* It is not in such an attitude of mind that men can receive the clear revelation of the Divine purpose. For the existence of personal bias, it is true, we may not be always or wholly responsible, but for readiness to lay it aside at the call of God, we most certainly are. The underlying assumption of all true prayer for God's direction is that it is God's thought of the position, *and His only,* that we seek. In every problem that arises, we can gain the knowledge of God's will only in so far as our own minds are laid freely at His disposal. In other words, the first condition of guidance is *that we are willing to be guided.*

In the second place, when God's will has once been made plain, we must be ready, with a strong and simple faith, to accept courageously whatever situation it involves. Our preconceived ideas and hopes are not the only means of setting limits to God's guidance; we may restrict Him just as surely by a nervous fear of consequences. The acts of God are often so drastic in their character that, from our cautious human standpoint, we find it hard to understand them. Sometimes before He builds up He breaks down. Sometimes He severs ere He unifies. He rejects a chosen nation. He divides a Church. He forsakes a long-established method. He abandons some time-honoured instrument of service. Even to His own people, at the hour of crisis, such far-reaching changes are apt to bring a blind and impotent perplexity. We confuse the "accidents" with the "essence" of His working. Through long experience we have learnt so closely to associate the Divine activity with certain forms through which it has expressed itself and certain conditions by which it has usually been accompanied, that when these forms and these conditions are endangered, we begin to fear for the Divine activity itself. The result may be, and often is, that an unworthy and mistaken dread of what may happen prejudices our mind against particular suggestions, thus gravely circumscribing our susceptibility to the Divine guidance. The moral is not, of course, that we must be reckless of possible

consequences, for there is a wise and altogether necessary attention that is due to them. It is the more sane and moderate lesson that we should not, through fear of them, make ourselves their slaves, since there is no less truly a respect for them that is both cowardly and altogether dangerous. Christian men and women can never safely neglect the faith that "ventures." The great type of faith is one who went forth "not knowing whither he went." Such a faith is the second essential condition of God's guidance. Just as we must strive to free our minds from every preconceived impression so we must abandon all unworthy fear. An undue bias may be given to our thought by the one no less than by the other. There is a price to be paid for clear knowledge of God's will, and not seldom that price may be the readiness to sacrifice our trusted methods, our reliance on particular persons or the security promised by some familiar "safeguard." We must be willing, with simple faith, to take the one step that is plainly right, and go forth with God, even though it be into the darkness of the unknown.

We now see a part, at least, of what is meant by the statement that the Divine guidance is spiritually conditioned. All thinking which, by prejudice, self-interest, or fear, asserts the "self" over against the interests of the Kingdom, thereby and to that extent impairs God's power of leading us. For those men and women, therefore, who wish to receive the clearest revelation of God's mind, the removal of every such restriction becomes a simple necessity. This is the third fundamental conviction in the standpoint we are seeking to elucidate.

III

The human fellowship with God on which reliance chiefly rests is *corporate* in character. This is no disparagement of the intercourse enjoyed by each separate soul with God, the necessity for which can never be transcended. But it is believed that that solitary contact with God does not exhaust the possibilities of our communion. No one of us lives unto himself. We are members one of another, and there is none who can say to his neighbour, "I have no need of thee." Hence in our common fellowship we may experience a mutual enrichment by means of which our whole capacity of vision and of receptivity will be enlarged. "Where two or three are gathered" in the Name a special promise of the Presence is assured; and therefore a group of men and women praying or thinking together with unity of spirit and purpose may expect to receive a blessing which is more than the sum

total of, and different in quality from, the blessing each would have received through the same amount of individual prayer or thought. This revived emphasis upon the reality of the Church's corporate life and upon its necessity to the complete experience of each member is full of significance, and no one should need to be reminded that it is simply a return to the New Testament point of view. Its practical outcome in the solving of the Kingdom's problems is that it yields us a clear and definite method in our search for God's guidance. We learn to look for His direction in a spiritual communion—a communion which is fellowship with one another as well as fellowship with Him; or, rather, since there are not two experiences but one, a communion which is fellowship with one another in Him.

We have called this a "clear and definite method." Since the impression derived from a merely general statement may rather be that it is somewhat vague and impractical, it may be well to furnish a more detailed description of the manner in which it is employed. A company of men and women meet together that they may seek that richer consciousness of God, and, with it, that clearer light upon truth or conduct, their need of which has been impressed upon them. The first requirement is that their power of receptivity shall be intensified. Of God's willingness to lead them there is no question. The only point of uncertainty is in their ability to discern and to respond to His direction. Therefore they will begin with earnest and united prayer. This prayer will not be hurried; it will be a sustained act of communion. And therein they will desire four things. First, they will together wait in silence for a more vivid sense of God's Presence and Reality. In the strain and bustle of ordinary life the vision of the unseen may easily grow dim; they will tarry in stillness before God, craving the penitence and cleansing through which it may once more be made clear to them. Next, they will together pray for the coming of the Kingdom. This will be no light and easy intercession; they will reverently strive to view men from God's own standpoint, and, so far as may be, to enter into His sorrow for the world's sin and His sympathy with the world's need. And when they have thus learnt a little less imperfectly to see mankind as God sees it, alike in its transgressions and in its ultimate possibilities, they will at last be ready, in the third place, to ask for light on the particular matter in which they need the Divine illumination. They will therefore pray together that in this special situation God's own design may be made plain to them. Lastly, that all hindrance in themselves may be removed, they will seek, before they turn to examine the problem, to be freed from every form of self-

assertion. In the consciously-realised presence of God, and relying on His aid, they will try to expel from their minds all previous bias, all personal preferences and all self-seeking motives, and at whatever cost, to will God's will both for themselves and for the world.

This prayer, it is important to observe, is offered in an atmosphere of fellowship. The group of men engaged is more than a mere collection of individuals; it is a body of believers—a small but essential section of that living organism which is the Church of Christ, Himself its living Head. On this account the entire spiritual efficiency alike of every part and of the whole is immeasurably increased. Because of its mystical union with its fellows and with the Head, each separate member acquires a power never possessed and never attainable in isolation. The prayer of each, his penitence, his consecration, his very experience of God's Presence, is deepened and enriched by those of all; and, in its turn, "through that which every joint supplieth" the entire body is itself built up in love. This is no idle dream of what might be; it is a statement of what actually takes place. And it is in this atmosphere of a fellowship both real and realised that those who employ the method we interpret are first made ready for the revelation of God's will.

From this act of united communion they will pass, in the same spirit of dependence, to their task of serious deliberation. The problem before them demands and must receive the most strenuous and enlightened thought that they are capable of affording. There could be no greater error than to infer from the stress laid on communion that the method is crudely quietistic, depreciating intelligence and trusting to vague and irrational impulses. On the contrary, we have met with no assemblies of men by whom the duty of sincere and resolute thinking is more clearly apprehended. True, their ultimate reliance is upon a wisdom higher than their own. Christ's promise that His Spirit shall guide them into all the truth they believe to be, not merely a beautiful ideal, but also a practical fact on which they may safely count. None the less, beneath this confidence in a heavenly guidance there dwells no lurking hostility to human reason. The inference drawn is rather that, since God has made us rational beings, it is through our minds that He will most naturally lead us. Therefore, prepared by united communion, they turn in their search for God's will to a frank and determined discussion.

IV

This brings us to another point at which for the proper understanding of the method, the utmost clearness becomes necessary. From first to last in all their discussions these men and women endeavour to think and talk *only in the spirit of their prayer.* They will use their brains, and use them, as we have said, at least as acutely as those who lay less practical stress upon prayer. But in all their thought their minds are made subject to a higher Control. That is to say, while they will bring their keenest intelligence to bear upon the problem under consideration, they will do so not as men of self-assertion who cling tenaciously to views already formed, but as men who are honestly seeking God's *guidance* and therefore are prepared, even at the cost of strongly-rooted prejudices, to revise all earlier conclusions by any new light that He may reveal to them.

This light they are ready to receive from any quarter. Indeed, they are more than ready, they are anxious, to do so. For they realise that in thought, as in all else, we are members one of another. Here once again the fundamental fact of corporate life emerges into prominence. No one man's mind, however cultivated and sincere, can perceive the whole truth, whether in relation to conduct or in relation to thought. As the physical light, falling on various objects, is reflected in various shades of colour, each but a partial presentation of its great original, so the light of truth, reflected from men's different minds, is found to exhibit many different aspects, in no single one of which can truth's perfect image be discerned. In the second case, as in the first, the pure white light is gained *only when all these partial reflections are combined.* Each individual's view needs to be checked and supplemented by the view of his fellows. It is not merely that no separate human being ever has attained a perfect wisdom; as a separate human being he never *can* attain it. He has been so made that he will find his fullest life only in fellowship with others—a fact which applies to his intellectual life as well as to life in all its other phases. As, then, he seeks to form right judgments, he has no power, even if he had the will, to be strictly independent. He was born a member of a body, and not even in his thinking has he the right to say to another, "I have no need of thee."

That being the case, men who are seeking God's guidance in any given situation, and believe that their minds are the instruments through which He is wont to direct them, will be eager to welcome light from every possible angle. It will be assumed that no single

point of view contains the whole truth which God is waiting to reveal; and this will be acknowledged even by those among whom that point of view may be most strongly maintained. But it will also be assumed that every point of view adopted by an honest thinker will probably embody some aspect of the truth—an aspect which, however partial or exaggerated, yet cannot safely be neglected in the final synthesis; and this fact will be freely recognised even by those who regard that standpoint with the utmost initial prejudice. In other words, the path to truth, whether in thought or in action, lies along the line of accepting light from every quarter—even from that with which at first we have the least degree of sympathy—and in focussing these scattered rays into as real a unity as we are then able to attain.

V

Two features of this method call, even at the risk of repetition, for a slightly extended emphasis. (*a*) Since an open mind, which is only another name for willingness to be taught, is one of its essential conditions, to ignore the view of those whose ideas are opposed to one's own; to regard it with suspicion; to treat it with sarcasm or ridicule; to overcome it merely by some clever ruse; most of all, to deny, in the Name of Christ, the fundamental Christian spirit by making the difference a ground for angry and unmannerly quarrels—to do any or all of these things is as unsafe as it is pagan. However little we realise the fact, it may in reality be to close our eyes to one of the sources from which some ray of God's own light was meant to come to us, and so to limit His power of leading us into the full knowledge of His will. Therefore, every man is not only allowed but expected to say exactly what he thinks, without the slightest fear of misunderstanding or offence. It is a basal assumption that truth is stronger than error and even than partial truth, and that undue sensitiveness at hearing one's own views criticised or contradicted is a latent form of self-assertion, unworthy of a Christian. (*b*) Though every man's conviction is thus entitled to respect, it is accepted only in so far as, after due consideration, it appears to be the medium of Divine direction. To assign an added weight to a man's opinion in virtue of his wealth, on the ground of his status, social or official, or because, forgetful of the Christian mind, he manifests a dogmatic and imperious temper, is nothing less than a betrayal of truth. Any who expected to command so adventitious an importance would be placing human considerations before

the interests of the Kingdom: any who yielded to it would be guilty of collusion in the sin. This error, like the wish to silence judgments contrary to our own, proves a most serious obstacle in the way of God's guidance. It involves, in fact, a denial of the very spirit and temper by which that guidance is conditioned.

In conversation conducted on such principles as these the clear and definite guidance of God may be confidently expected. Badly stated in black and white, this truth may seem somewhat vague and unconvincing: experienced in actual practice, its impressiveness is at times almost startling, and some of its definite results have been remarkable. For when self-assertion has once been forsaken, and through its removal men's minds are at last made truly receptive, a very real and precious fellowship in thought is rendered possible. Mind acts freely on mind, each in its turn exploring, checking, challenging the other. The thought of each is quickened and stimulated. It rises to possibilities as yet unrealised in its moments of solitary activity. Exaggerations are corrected, deficiencies supplied, the sense of proportion duly adjusted. And in the process many earlier differences of view are found to disappear. A perceptible *rapprochement* is effected, and in the end a measure of agreement reached which at the outset would have appeared in the highest degree improbable. It is in this way that, as each individual thinker approaches nearer to a common centre, the wonderful phenomenon of *corporate thought* is experienced.

It must not be supposed, of course, that this result is always, or even generally, achieved with ease. The process is one which calls for determined thinking and untiring patience. To seem to suggest that, even in such an atmosphere, difficulties conveniently vanish of themselves would be entirely misleading and untrue. Initial differences of judgments are not to be reconciled by hastily-considered suggestions or within a previously determined time-limit: they yield only to the disinterested search which is prepared to spare neither time nor effort in seeking for the truth. In such a search, indeed, the first stage will often seem to accentuate rather than to reduce the difficulties. For since, in the final synthesis, due weight is to be assigned to the truth underlying every standpoint that can fairly be defended, the earliest step of all must be to bring each difficulty out into the open light, to consider it frankly without bias, and to endeavour to appreciate its degree of strength no less than the points at which it is capable of adjustment. Discussion of the differences of judgment thus thrown into clear relief will naturally issue in more than one kind of result. Sometimes the differences will be resolved more quickly; at other times with greater effort. Sometimes the

agreement reached will be complete; at other times it will be only partial. In each alternative, however, the progress from diversity towards unity will normally be found to be so marked and so impressive that no mere power of human persuasion will any longer appear sufficient to account for it. In the view of those by whom it has actually been experienced, there is only one explanation which will satisfy the facts. In response to their united prayer and faith they have received a very real and definite guidance of God.

VI

Here, then, is a definite and practical method of seeking to learn the will of God. Its basal assumption is that of Scripture—the abiding reality of the Divine guidance. It does not, however, in any final sense, oppose the Divine guidance to human reason. It teaches, rather, that, instead of being alternative means of direction between which we have to choose, these two are complementary the one to the other. We have not to trust *either* Divine guidance *or* human reason: our reliance should be upon Divine guidance revealed *through* human reason; but through human reason disciplined for this very purpose in two ways—firstly, by communion with God, and secondly, by fellowship in thought and prayer with other men.

It is this emphasis upon fellowship—with our fellow-men as well as with God—that forms the distinctive mark of the method we have been studying. This emphasis does not ignore the place of the individual in the world's moral and religious development. Most of our progress in the past has been inspired by great leaders of thought and action, and the need for them will probably never be outgrown. But—apart from the fact that even they are largely the product and mouthpiece of the common tendencies of their age—the personalities of great leaders are not the only medium through which Divine illumination may come to us. In the fellowship of ordinary men and women, consecrated by their devotion to Christ and to one another, there lies a power which neither the world nor the Church of the present day has learnt adequately to appreciate.

To the value and reality of this power it has been our aim to invite attention, and with this end in view we have expounded one method by which it may be applied. Needless to say, this method is not the only one available: in the great search for truth and duty the principles of fellowship may be explored along many other detailed lines than those traced out in the present

chapter. Nor, again, is the method possessed of any quasi-magical virtue, as though it could yield men direction in return for its merely mechanical application: its efficacy resides exclusively in the spiritual aim and attitude by which it is conditioned. The claim we have sought to make for it is, neither that it stands alone as a medium for guidance nor that it has acquired any arbitrary or artificial value, but that, applied with strict fidelity to its underlying principles, it has been proved by experience to be a real and powerful instrument of progress. Its employment even on a limited scale has already produced definite and remarkable results: its latent possibilities we believe to be incalculable. The Church in this generation has yet to learn the secret of fellowship. The consequences of such an enlightenment no prophet could foretell. It may be that for the Church to master that secret would be to solve her most inveterate problems and to find the key to the triumph of the Kingdom.

III: FELLOWSHIP IN ACTION

I

If our argument is valid, on the one hand, that a relatively untapped source of immense power lies in fellowship in thought and in prayer; and, on the other hand, that the world is in peril of chaos for lack of this very gift, it must follow that the immediate and sustained practice of fellowship is vital at once to the life of the Church and to the saving of the world. It is not that the Church has the choice whether she will go on living without fellowship or with it. There is no such alternative. If she has fellowship she will have life—abundantly. But if she fails in fellowship she will die. And with her would surely die the world's last great hope of a life of enduring and ordered freedom for all races of men.

We hold the lively hope of the Kingdom of God. We believe in the Church as His organ for bringing into being that new humanity which is the Kingdom on earth. Yet, we see the Church divided and faltering at its task, failing at once in vision and in action, largely through the defects of its experience and practice of fellowship in Christ; and the world in peril through lack of her leadership. The challenge is absolute and ultimate.

What, then, are we—here and now—to do?

We are called, first to build up a new life of fellowship in the Church for the world. The Christian Society, as we have seen, is ideally a spiritual fellowship denominated by the idea of the Kingdom of God. It is a brotherhood so intimately united with Christ that it is His body; its members are His members. It is so filled and fused with the Holy Spirit that its separate elements are fitly framed together in His living temple. It has the mind of Christ so fully and in such unity that His will is its will and it thinks His thought. And as His thought and will are for the redemption of men everywhere, that aim—the coming of His Kingdom—dominates its life.

Holding this ideal of the life of the Church before us steadily, with its outline clearly focussed, we discover at least four lines along which the practice of fellowship in the Church can be ad-

ventured; each avenue of exploration being vitally linked with all the others. There is, first, the life of that congregation of Christian folk with whom we worship under one roof; there is, secondly, fellowship in co-operation with the other local groups or congregations—the Christians of other denominations in the place where we live; there is, thirdly, the whole life of the denomination to which our own little local congregation belongs; and there is, fourthly, the fellowship on the larger scale of "the Holy Church throughout all the world."

II

Christendom is sharply divided upon many issues. But in every town and city in the world concrete wrongs flourish which all Christian folk immediately recognise as evil. And there are definite, explicit principles accepted by all informed Christian consciences as foundations for reform.

There is, therefore, among Christian folk in a town, beneath the doctrinal and ecclesiastical chasms that separate them, a real basis of thorough unity both in the condemnation of wrongs and in support of needed reform. Yet those local civic evils of slum or vice or corruption persist, and in only a few places is any effective challenge being made to them, or any constructive remedy being vigorously and persistently presented. It is at once tragic and grossly sinful that a nest of courts and alleys unfit for the nurture of beasts, let alone of human beings; a plethora of public-houses in a given area; bad conditions of labour in factories or in workshops, and many other anti-social and anti-Christian evils should persist unchallenged in any city from which they could be swept away by corporate action of Christian folk.

The major cause for this general paralysis of the Church does not lie so much in the absence of a Christian conscience as in the fact that that conscience is not stimulated and mobilized. The root reason for this lack of stimulus and direction lies essentially in the lack of local fellowship. Continuous Christian fellowship in a city or village, on a corporate interdenominational basis, will bring together the separate flickering lights of the divided Christian people into one powerful and effective flame.

That flame once kindled can burn, not only to destroy old evils, but to light up new paths. The very fact of the destruction of the evil comes from propulsive and expulsive force of a new ideal. But the process once initiated not only destroys evil but builds good. It is constructive; it is architectural. A new civic con-

science is created which itself sets a new standard for the plans of the local authorities in housing, in educating, in social purity, in economic relations, and indeed in the whole complex of human relationships. If the Christian conscience in an increasing number of cities and towns of the world were fired and focussed for re-shaping the life of those places on Christian principles, the social structure would rapidly be transformed into some likeness to that Divine City of which the ultimate plan is hidden in the heart of God.

What stands between us and that desired result? It is, we suggest, almost entirely the lack of conscious, continuous fellowship in thought and prayer between the Christian men and women on whose hearts the social civic wrongs around them are a haunting "concern." The men and women who are alive to the evils go about their life weighed down with a sickening sense of impotence in the fact of the crying need. They feel that alone and separate they are impotent. Yet if they were yoked together in the irresistible vigour of a living and even exuberant Christian fellowship of spiritual communion and "mental sweat"; if they continually gathered together at once to think through the problems both of principle and action and to seek unitedly for the living power to carry the results into effect, a permanent contribution to the foundation of the City of God would be made.

III

The fellowship of Christendom is broken. There is no Table Round. The seamless garment is rent. The voice of the Church is silent when it should proclaim one clear, authoritative call, and divided and feeble when it should declare one strong, authentic word to direct humanity up the steep paths that climb from the morasses that threaten to engulf man up to the shining security of the plateaux of Peace.

The challenge is absolute; the call is ultimate and inescapable. If the world is to be saved, if Christ's glory is to fill the earth, the broken fellowship must be united, the seamless mystic garment must be woven afresh. That sacred mystery which is the Church must, fitly framed together, grow unto a holy temple in the Lord; "an habitation of God through the Spirit."

"I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long suffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

"There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

"Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."

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